

National Pollinator Week: Pollinator Practices Take Root at DelDOT

Delaware's drivers may notice more flowers sprouting up on the state's nearly 14,000 lane miles of roadside this year. The steep decline of monarch butterflies and other pollinator species is believed to be due in part to loss of suitable habitats. Pollinators are animals that help plants reproduce by moving pollen from one part of the plant to another. Because many crops depend on pollination, pollinators contribute billions of dollars' worth of value to the economy each year.

Over the past several years, [DelDOT implemented changes](#) to its management practices to benefit pollinators. In the past, the agency promoted well-manicured turf grass along the state's roads. These management practices effectively create food deserts for pollinators who depend on blooming plants. To support pollinators, DelDOT started incorporating more native species and clover into its seed mixes, and has transitioned to a reduced mowing regime. For instance, along portions of SR 1, the agency continues to mow a safety strip adjacent to the road, but land beyond the safety strip is not mowed during most of the growing season. This allows wildflowers an opportunity to thrive, which can benefit pollinators.

"There are numerous areas along our roads throughout the state that we have regularly mowed just to keep the natural growth down. This innovative program allows DelDOT to not only help pollinators, but it reduces the amount of mowing in some areas and provides a much more visually appealing landscape by our roads," said **Secretary of Transportation Jennifer Cohan**.

"Conservation is an all-hands-on-deck effort and I'm so glad

that DelDOT is committing to being part of the solution for Delaware's native species decline," said **Sen. Stephanie Hansen**, D-Middletown, who chaired the Ecological Extinction Task Force and has been a champion for conservation in the General Assembly. "This is a win-win for the agency, for our environment, for taxpayers, and for motorists who get to drive past miles of wildflowers. It's also a valuable demonstration to individual landowners, businesses, and neighborhoods that best practices for conservation aren't just ecologically friendly, but also often look better and cost less than the alternative. I'm grateful to Sec. Cohan and her team for their partnership in protecting Delaware's pollinators and promoting conservation."

DelDOT is also partnering with other organizations to create more pollinator habitats. DelDOT's Roadside Environmental Supervisor, Darin Callaway, created experimental pollinator plots through a partnership with Dr. Susan Barton from the University of Delaware's College of Agriculture & Natural Resources Extension Program. The results of the experimental plots will inform Delaware's future pollinator plantings. The agency is also set to break ground on a 43-acre pollinator meadow mitigation site outside of Middletown. DelDOT's Environmental Planner, Erika Furlong, partnered with DNREC's Eric Ludwig to design and install the site, and the Delaware Forest Service's Todd Gsell will help maintain it.

DelDOT has joined 24 energy and transportation organizations to develop a conservation agreement for the monarch butterfly. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) is expected to [decide whether or not to list the monarch butterfly under the Endangered Species Act next year.](#) The conservation agreement's purpose is to facilitate voluntary conservation measures to benefit the monarch butterfly (and other pollinators) by energy and transportation organizations that manage large tracts of land. In exchange, USFWS would provide greater regulatory certainty and help streamline requirements under

the Endangered Species Act if the monarch is listed. The efforts are led by the University of Illinois at Chicago and are an outgrowth of the Rights-of-Way as Habitat Working Group.

DelDOT's pollinator efforts reflect the agency's commitment to environmental stewardship and to staying in line with industry practices, which increasingly recognize the ecological value of roadsides. At the start of National Pollinator Week, DelDOT hopes residents will help spread the buzz about pollinators and the important role that they play!

To learn more about National Pollinator Week, [visit the Pollinator Partnership.](#)